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NEWS

Winchester officials blindsided by 20% insurance hike, adds $1M to budget shortfall

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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Winchester is facing higher insurance costs for FY26, pushing a possible deficit to over $3 million. COURTESY PHOTO/CORPORATE FINANCE INSTITUTE

Facing an 18.92% increase in health insurance costs for fiscal yea
Winchester officials warn that residents should prepare for diffic

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financial decisions ahead.

With Town Meeting approaching in April, officials are evaluating potential cost-saving measures to mitigate the budget impact and avoid deeper deficits in the coming years.

Health insurance expenditures have jumped nearly 8% from fiscal year 2024 to fiscal year 2025, growing from $12.9 million to $13.9 million. At the halfway point of the current fiscal year, Winchester has already spent $6.6 million on employee health insurance, up from $5.7 million at the same time last year.

Town officials said they were prepared for a cost increase, but were caught off guard when the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) projected a much higher rate hike than expected for FY26.

“As I had mentioned during the budget summit and other meetings prior to this one, we had been advised by MIIA, our health insurance provider, that we should be carrying a 10% increase for FY26,” Town Administrator Beth Rudolph said at a recent Select Board meeting. “At their annual meeting a couple weeks ago, MIIA announced that their average was 14.8% with a low of 9.9 and a high of 19%. Unfortunately, our number has come in at 18.92%. When you add in all of the additional retiree health insurance costs, it’s about a 20% increase.”

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Town Comptroller Stacie Ward noted the unprecedented nature of the increase.

“We did well keeping our costs under control in recent years by s
providers and making other adjustments,” she said. “But this 20%
something we didn’t anticipate, and it’s going to be a real challenge.”

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Town officials are confronting a rapidly expanding budget deficit that has grown to $3.57 million for FY26, nearly $1 million higher than projections from just weeks ago, driven largely by an unexpected spike in employee health insurance costs.

This shortfall could grow even larger in coming years, potentially reaching more than $14 million by fiscal year 2030 if left unchecked.

The School Committee has requested $70 million for FY26, a 5.84% increase over the current year, describing it as a “level services budget” that maintains existing programs without funding new initiatives.

Select Board member Bill McGonigle emphasized fiscal caution, noting, “We’re in a situation now with our budget that we have to be careful about every dollar.”

Town officials are working with their health insurance consultant to evaluate options for reducing costs before the April Spring Town Meeting, where members will play a crucial role in determining how to manage these rising expenses.

The Finance Committee will hold a public meeting on March 10 to discuss potential cost-saving measures before the FY26 budget is finalized.

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior highlighted the mounting financial pressures on residents, noting they already face $1,000 in additional annual property taxes — $800 per household for Lynch School borrowing and $200 for the Community Preservation Act — before any potential general override is considered to plug the expanding shortfall.

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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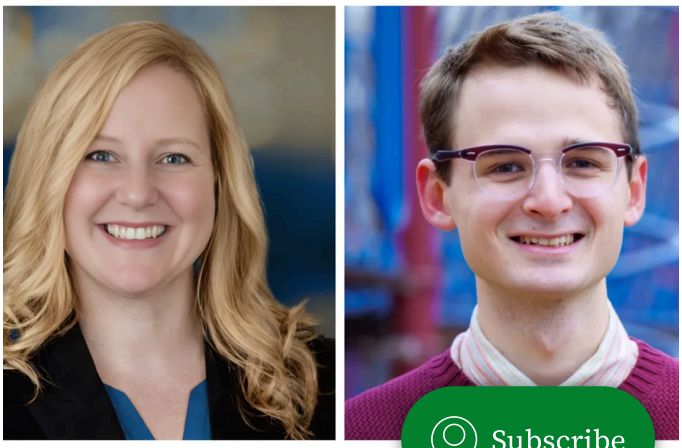

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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